

NOV 30 2005



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Dear Reviewer:

In accordance with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, we enclose for your review the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Pacific Coast Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat.

This FEIS evaluates the effects of a comprehensive strategy to conserve and enhance essential fish habitat (EFH) for fish managed under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The comprehensive strategy to conserve EFH, including its identification and the implementation of measures to minimize adverse impacts to EFH from fishing, to the extent practicable, must be consistent with provisions in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and implementing regulations. Implementation of the strategy may require that the FMP be amended to describe any change in the EFH identification and description, among other things. New regulations would be required to implement minimization measures. Preparation of this FEIS stems from a 2000 court order in *American Oceans Campaign et. al. v. Daley et. al.*, Civil Action No. 99-982 (GK)(D.D.C. September 14, 2000), which requires NMFS and the Pacific Fishery Management Council to prepare an environmental impact statement to evaluate the effects of fishing on EFH and identify measures to minimize those impacts, to the extent practicable. This FEIS includes an analysis of a reasonable range of alternatives, identification of the final preferred alternative, responses to comments, and appropriate revisions to the draft document. After publication of the FEIS, a 30-day "cooling off" period ensues before the responsible official may sign a record of decision and implement the proposed action. NMFS must approve any FMP amendment and implementing regulations it deems necessary by May 6, 2006.

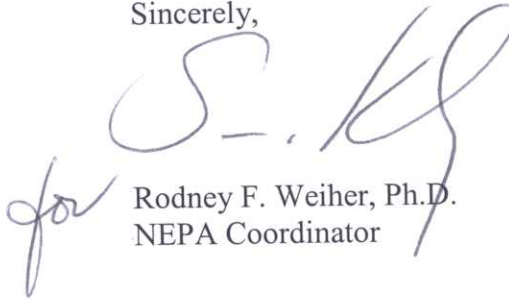
Additional copies of the FEIS may be obtained from Maryann Nickerson, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, (206) 526-4490. The document is also accessible electronically through the NMFS Regional Website at www.nwr.nmfs.noaa.gov.

Comments or questions on this document submitted during the agency's 30-day review period for the FEIS must be received by January 9, 2006. Written comments should be submitted by mail to D. Robert Lohn, Northwest Regional Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115. Comments may be submitted by facsimile (fax) to (206) 526-6736. Electronic comments may be submitted by e-mail to GroundfishEFHFEIS.nwr@noaa.gov; include in the comment subject line the following document identifier: Comment on Groundfish EFH FEIS. A copy of your comments should be submitted to me by mail to the NOAA Strategic Planning Office (PPI/SP), SSMC3, Room 15603, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910; by fax to (301) 713-0585; or by e-mail to nepa.comments@noaa.gov.



NMFS is not required to respond to comments received as a result of the issuance of the FEIS. However, comments received will be reviewed and considered for their impact on the issuance of a record of decision (ROD). The ROD will be made available publicly following final agency action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. F. Weiher", is written over the typed name. To the left of the signature, the word "for" is handwritten in a cursive script.

Rodney F. Weiher, Ph.D.
NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure